

Sally, T.C.

By W. F. BRYAN.

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Sarah Henrietta Westervelt was the same entered in the register of the Ivy clad church, and in her baby days she was called Sally. But from the day her Cupid's arch of a mouth learned to frame intelligent sentences Jack Hardy had dubbed her the "town crier."

The nickname was so apt that it stuck, being reduced for simplicity's sake to T. C. Even during those stern minutes in the library with her father he often dropped the sober Sarah for the more universal T. C.

T. C.'s nickname was due to her genius for the dissemination of bits of gossip best forgotten. Her mind seemed naturally to empty itself of all information, and young Hardy altered an old saw into "What goes in T. C.'s ear comes out of her mouth."

As T. C. grew in understanding the habit got her more firmly in its grip. Instead of learning to appreciate the value of reticence, her wider scope of knowledge served only the better to equip her for the gathering of sundry bits of gossip which she would blurt out at the most inopportune occasions until not only her family, but her friends, came to regard her with an affection that was not unmixed with terror.

T. C., being a sensitive little soul, grieved in secret and made earnest vows that she would tattle no more.



HE GATHERED HER TROUBLESOME LITTLE SISTER TO HIS BEMUSE.

She meant to mend her ways, but at the first opportunity her store of knowledge would roll out unchecked and unregulated.

It was to Jack Hardy that she always went for sympathy and advice when these revelations and their consequences hung heavy over her head. Though Jack had given her the odious nickname, he made partial atonement by never employing it.

To him she was "Peterkin," and, though frequently he was a sufferer from her disclosures, he was ever ready with advice, sympathy or candy, as the occasion seemed to demand, for he alone apparently realized that her fault was temperamental and not the result of maliciousness.

T. C. fairly worshipped Hardy, yet all the little intimate details of his courtship of her sister Nell leaked out along with the rest of her chatter, and there were times when Hardy's forbearance was put to a hard test. It was characteristic of the man that even the personal experience did not abate his sympathy for T. C., not even when he proposed to Nell and was given a negative answer.

When Nell made hysterical reference to another girl he felt that he had T. C. to thank for this, yet his office still was her haven of refuge, and she stoutly denied that she had said anything about some other woman.

Hardy's questions had to be discreetly framed if he did not wish the

fact of his rejection to become common talk, and he could not press the investigation. Instead he sought absorption in work, but the practice of a country lawyer seldom proves absorbing, and Hardy grew thin and white while he waited and hoped for a clearing up of the trouble.

He was sitting idly at his desk one afternoon when T. C. poked her head into the doorway and, finding that he was alone, entered boldly.

"What is it, Peterkin?" he asked, printing a kiss on the child's troubled face. "Have you been telling the minister what your father said when he was asked to contribute to the church fund, or did you explain to the guests at the party that the salad was made with canned lobster?"

"Worse 'an that," was the doleful declaration as T. C. snuggled against the broad shoulder. "The school committee visited this afternoon. Mr. Sprague asked us what love was, and I told him it was the way the principal acted with Miss Saunders. They all laughed, but Miss Squires got red in the face, and I was expelled. 'He kisses her when he thinks no one can see him, and she calls him 'Georgie.' I wouldn't call any man with whiskers 'Georgie,' like a little boy."

"Wait until you grow up," admonished Hardy. "But, see here, Peterkin, I know Mr. Torrance very well. Perhaps I can beg you off if you promise to keep out of his love affairs in future."

"You just bet I will!" declared T. C. withunction. "Lovers are funny people. There's Nell just crying her eyes out because you carry some other girl's picture in your watch."

"What do you know about that picture?" asked Hardy tensely. "Did you tell Nell about that?"

"I saw it one day when you left your watch on the desk," explained T. C. "I didn't tell Nell. I just said it was funny that you had another girl's picture in your watch when Nell's new pictures are so much prettier."

Hardy sprang up from his desk and set T. C. upon her feet. "Look here, Peterkin," he proposed. "You take this dime and find a place where you can get ice cream soda. Don't be in too much of a hurry to drink it. Better get two. Meantime I'll slip over to the house and sort of prepare them for the news that you are expelled."

T. C. gurgled a delighted assent, and presently they emerged from the office building, and T. C. went skipping along to the candy store, while Jack made for the Westervelt home.

Nell was sitting on the shade piazza as he came up the path. As she saw him she rose to her feet, but it was too late for a graceful retreat. He sprang up the steps and caught her hand.

"Don't go in," he pleaded. "Let's sit out here. It is more pleasant."

"Shall I call father?" she asked. "He is in the library."

"I hope to see him before I go," declared Hardy meaningly. "But first I want to speak to you."

Nell flushed at the suggestion, but she resumed her place in the rocker, and Jack drew a chair to her side.

"When I asked you to marry me you said something about another girl," he began, plunging directly into the subject. "At the time I suspected that T. C. might be able to explain the allusion, but I did not dare question her too closely lest I give forth more information than I obtained. She let it out today. Was it because of that other girl in my watch that you refused me, Nell?"

"No woman cares to be counted second best," was the defensive reply. "Have you changed the photograph again?"

"I have not changed," he said slowly, "but I want you to see it."

He held the watch toward her with the back case open. She saw the likeness of a gentle faced woman who somehow suggested an earlier period in spite of the modern photography. Silently she passed it back to Hardy and waited for an explanation.

"This is my father's watch," he began. "The picture is that of my mother. When she died we had only an old painting of her. Father had it copied, and they made a splendid job of it. That is why I have another woman's picture in my case. When you spoke of 'the other woman' I could not know that Sally had been investigating my watch. She found it on my desk one

day. I just learned this and understood your feeling of resentment."

"I supposed that you knew and had no explanation to offer."

"And you will give me another answer now?" he asked as he gained possession of her hand.

An hour later a freckled face thrust itself above the hedge of the Westervelt lawn; then, seeing Hardy on the piazza, T. C. came boldly forward.

"Did you fix it, Jack?" she demanded. Hardy blushed.

"I was fixing another of your scrapes," he explained. "Nell, Peterkin has been expelled from school, but I have promised to see Torrance in her behalf. Meanwhile I have promised that she will not be scolded."

"I couldn't scold her this afternoon," said Nell as he gathered her troublesome little sister to her breast. "You make a great deal of trouble for people, T. C., sometimes, but then again you set them right."

"I'm not to blame that there isn't any stopper to my brain," was the aggrieved explanation. "Jack knows that. That's why he fixed things for me all right."

"You're a dear," said Nell and Jack in chorus, and for once the town crier had the comfortable feeling that she was appreciated.

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